

Dream of Flying

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Summary: A boy follows his dream, no matter what it costs.

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By "Clinesteron Beademung", with all of love.

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Comments and criticism welcome.

For as long as I can remember, I've dreamed of flying.

My first memories are of winter. Feathers of ash float on the rising flames in my father's fireplace. I try to catch one. The burn doesn't hurt as much as the sound of Father's voice or the blow to my face.

In the spring I try to catch dandelion seeds, wanting them to pick me up and carry me away but the secret of their magic eludes me no matter how fast I run. Out of breath I fall, and startle a flapping, squawking something out of the grass. A bird, the first I've ever seen up close.

All summer, I forget about dandelions.

When I am old enough I work in my father's bicycle shop after school. He teaches me about metal frames and rubber tires as if he were a wizard, impatient and harsh, passing arcane knowledge on to a bumbling apprentice. What I learn seems mundane, distant from my classroom lessons, and even more remote from the lessons I learn at

the window beside my desk. Crows land and perch on the power lines. I study them instead.

My grades that year are poor. Father punishes me with extra duties in the shop. I don't mind, to be honest, and I enjoy the time alone to think. In the basement, I contemplate crows and wonder how something so large can fly.

I sweep to the door of Father's workshop. I am not allowed to go in there.

Inside, I find and pick up Father's new frame design. I can carry it with two well-placed fingers. A matter of material and of balance, I realize. Hollow tubes, hollow bones.

Father finds me doing what he has forbidden. When I wake up, bruised and sore, he is gone. I ask my mother where he is.

Beyond the wall, she says. Beyond the wall.

I graduate at the top of my class. My mother dies a year later and the shop is mine.

In the fall I fall in love, or rather, I am fallen in love with. I know her from school. She's a sweet girl, and kind, and comes to my shop often. I should begrudge the distraction from my drawings and figures more than I do.

I have my work, I tell her. She understands, she tells me. After the singing of the walls and a winter courtship, we are married in the new spring.

One bright summer I find it difficult to stay at home. The wind farm reaps its harvest and I must know how. Not a simple matter of air pressure, no, my own experiments prove that. I have to know more, and every rare windless day I wait for one of the blades to stop where I can reach it.

My wife wants me to spend more time with the baby. I have work to do, I tell her.

Finally I get lucky. I carry my longest ladder to the wind farm, climb up to a motionless blade closest to the ground. An unusual cross sectional shapeâ€œ how interesting, almost like a bird's wingâ€œ

There's a strong gust of wind, all I remember. My injuries are not severe but they keep me from my duties at the shop. Lots of time to think.

For crying out loud, all I want is paper and something to write with. Can't she keep that kid quiet for one damn second?

My wife runs the shop now. There's no one else and I don't dare entrust anything to the eager Haibane who wander about like sad, flightless birds in search of sustenance. The Toga watch them too closely, and the Toga must not find out what I'm building.

My son is a good lad, I know this down to the marrow of my bones. Every kind word, every sweet smile from him is like a knife to my

heart. One busy night he offers to help, and I let him. His innocent mistake costs me a month's effort.

The community watch questions me. Thank goodness they don't search the shop. Next morning, my wife and son are gone.

I close my father's bicycle shop. Drop by drop the well of my inheritance runs dry. The Haibane leave me food, and I eat.

Years pass, and just like that, it's finished. I wait for darkest night to move my opus piece by piece to the patch of land I purchased with the last of my father's money. In the false dawn the machine comes together like magic; by now I can assemble it blindfolded. I check the treated silk wings and the wind engine I made with a rebuilt scooter motor. All is well, and ready.

I strap myself into the feather-light frame and seat, and hear bells.

Bells!

I pray the engine starts and pull the cord. My prayers are answered and my beloved ship propels me forward and the moment my craft yearns to leave the ground it occurs to me that for all my knowledge of flight, I know nothing of flying. As if in a dream I pull back the control lever, and I am in the air, soaring into the oncoming day. I hold my ship steady, not daring to move the control either left or right, not that it matters. I increase the power and I feel a shove in the seat of my pants. I'm climbing.

Your father is beyond the wall, Mother said all those years ago. When I am gone, will my son look for me?

In minutes I am over the wall, andâ€¦no. Impossible! Some kind of illusion, a trick played on the eyes! Above and below, all is sky, nothing but endless, endless skyâ€"

I wrench the control to the right for a turn. Too hard. My beautiful wing folds like a closing book, and I fall. The crows follow me down.

"What do you remember about your cocoon dream?"

I am surrounded by others like me, or almost like me. My wings, black with sin, tingle with every involuntary twitch. My halo floats hot and steady like a summer sun over my head.

I wish they'd stop looking at me like that. As if they know me.

"I rememberâ€¦flyingâ€¦"

Author's Afterword

Revised December 2005; republished January 2006. Thank you for reading!

End
file.